

JOYCE STUDIES IN ITALY

21

**LANGUAGE
AND LANGUAGES
IN JOYCE'S FICTION**

Edited by
Serenella Zanotti

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THE “WHEREABOUTS” OF THE INTERTEXTUAL-
GENETICAL IN JOYCE AND STERNE

Three Senses of Genesis in Joyce and Sterne

One of the writers whose work is most frequently invoked when the critic wants to provide some kind of precedent or even genesis for the “feast” of literary expansiveness and variety that we find in Joyce is, of course, Laurence Sterne and I return to the rich Joyce-Sterne connection for my contribution to this “feast” of languages which harks back to the 1995 tribute to *Giorgio Melchiori: Feast of Languages*, and before it to Melchiori’s own *Joyce in Rome: The Genesis of ‘Ulysses’* (1984) giving rise to a wealth of volumes on *Romantic Joyce*, *Classic Joyce*, *Joyce’s Victorians*, *Joyce and the Recirculation of Realism*, *Joyce, Yeats and the Revival* and *Shakespearean Joyce*, *Joycean Shakespeare* just to list some of the distinctive ones that have charted out Joyce’s place in various literary traditions that have appeared since then. We all know that no single author can be credited as the original of everything in such an encyclopaedically allusive writer as Joyce but Sterne makes a recurrent and satisfying point of reference precisely because his writing too is allusive and encyclopaedic and both writers seem driven by a common comic logic which makes the search for specific origins and single locations doomed from the start if not ultimately absurd.

It would take longer than I have here just to list all the critics who have connected Joyce and Sterne. Consequently I propose instead to invoke three different senses of the word genetic (with and beyond the sense used by the school of Joycean notebook and textual scholars who have told us so much, especially about *Finnegans Wake* in recent decades) in approaching this well-known textual relationship once again

here. Another important strain of contemporary Joyce theory, represented by Jean-Michel Rabaté, offers us a quite different sense of the word which undoubtedly encourages a wider approach. Rabaté's deconstructive *Joyce Upon the Void: The Genesis of Doubt* (a book which responds to the critique of continental theory in Geert Lernout's *The French Joyce*) offered an argument which set genetic discovery of the empirical kind against a Foucauldian concept of the genealogical as at least in some sense produced by the enquiring mind and a Derridean idea of the original as always lost. His argument in that book is full of revealing genetical connections for Joyce (including those to the Biblical book of *Genesis*) whilst at the same time it draws on a version of the psychoanalytic according to which the search for an original speaks to unconscious needs as much as it may do to a chronology of cause and effect.

My examples of aspects of Joyce's relation to Sterne, then, acknowledge this variety by distinguishing three distinct aspects of the "genetical" relationship between the two allowing me to visit both empirical textual genetics and psychoanalytic-deconstructive theory, before arriving at one especially intriguing and I hope especially exemplary location or "whereabouts" of the intertextual-genetical relation.

Searching for the gap between the words

The first of these aspects can be seen in Joyce's well-known use of Sterne's 1768 comic travelogue *A Sentimental Journey* in the passage of the "Oxen of the Sun" episode of *Ulysses* where Bannon recounts his sentimental meeting with Milly Bloom, encouraged by the ribald Buck Mulligan and then Lynch recalls his girlfriend Kitty and her controversial views on contraception. This is an example whose interest is clearly based on certain kinds of evidence that link the two and on a certain type of argument about the connection. Joyce, in composing the *avant-garde* fictional exercise of the chronological sequence of English prose parodies or pastiches for "Oxen of the Sun", explained his authorial intentions in the letter to Frank Budgen of March 1920 which is often the first port of call for anyone reading the episode and among the strongest kinds of evidence for the textual scholar. That letter outlines the stylistic premise of

the prose parodies or pastiches and provides a list of the authors parodied specifically naming “Defoe-Swift and Steele-Addison-Sterne” (SL 252). The critic knows where to look and, if we need further evidence of what original Joyce was parodying and aspects of the method by which he did it, we can trace back through several extant compositional stages of proof, typescript, manuscript and the 20 densely-packed “Oxen” Notesheets in the British Library, transcribed by David Hayman, and available in facsimile since the 1970s in the Garland Joyce Archive which records Joyce’s notetaking from *A Sentimental Journey* for this passage. The research of Robert Janusko (1983) and others on the sources of the episode show how much more we can glean from studying what Joyce read of his sources in their originals behind what he claimed to be doing and the notes he made.

Our curiosity about Joyce’s use of Sterne here may include such questions as whether, for example, his reading was based on a full independent text of *Sentimental Journey* in one edition or other or on one of the many anthologies of English prose writing (notably William Peacock’s single volume anthology *English Prose from Mandeville to Ruskin*, 1903) and histories of English literature with quoted extracts for stylistic analysis (notably Saintsbury’s *History of English Prose Rhythm*), the two best known source texts which we know he used both for his teaching and for the composition of the episode.

The reader (perhaps even one still struggling with the difficulty of reading the episode itself) may quickly learn that the comedy of this passage can be much funnier and more interesting when we realise that it is a parody of an extremely funny original. Though we can no longer assume that all readers of Joyce will have already read Sterne, some will take the trouble to become familiar with that original to help them read. Once connected the two passages may well throw up a range of broader critical questions beyond the scholarly tracking of a source. These might include the nature of the comedy of both writers, the diachronic characteristics of literary style or of the represented world of the scenes depicted in Sterne and Joyce. The sexual politics of this parodic performance of retrosexuality, the history and controversies surrounding the contraceptive practices and devices referred to seems likely to interest the reader since the dis-

cussion is taking place in the board room of a maternity hospital whilst Mina Purefoy is giving birth on the ward.

Words and phrases noted as being harvested from *A Sentimental Journey* itself on Notesheet 14 (in Herring's numeration), among a range of other sources for period vocabulary, include "quit the field", and "hand her to her coach" (the first and last of which turn up in the final text at *U* 14.761, 795) and "*tres volontiers*" (suggestive of Bannon and Lynch's cod sentimental French though not actually one of the phrases used). We can see Joyce seeking to parody a period style in his notetaking as much as a single author or text or scene here. On the other hand there are certainly useful examples of the kind of scene or incident that is being parodied here in the three brief passages in Peacock which derive, respectively, from the comic incident from Volume VII of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* where Tristram has his meeting with the ass (Sterne 2009: 420-1), the passage from Volume VIII where Uncle Toby peers into the Widow Wadman's eye at her would-be seductive invitation, "as venereal a pair of eyes as ever stood in a head" as Sterne puts it (Sterne 2009: 465) and Yorrick's thoughts on tipping or "almsgiving" from the opening of *Sentimental Journey* (Sterne 2005: 5-10). Saintsbury, incidentally, who Joyce uses for earlier mediaeval parts of "Oxen" and who analyses substantial passages of Addison and Steele, explicitly excluded Sterne from his history on the grounds of his "deliberate and constant use of mechanical means to enforce such emphasis as he drives at" which "puts him practically out of court with us" (Saintsbury 1912: 260).

The most immediately recognisable Sternicisms in the "Oxen" passage include the use of French words mentioned above and perhaps above all the aposiopesis or obtrusively material dash denoting an absent or deleted word which the reader is, for the joke to work, only too able and eager to complete themselves. No doubt this appealed to Joyce's fascination with the minutiae of textual diacritics and to the absurd logic of literary censorship which purports to conceal that which is already known to the reader. For an analogy to the style of the comic scene depicted we could draw on any of the three above extracts from Peacock though the closest scene in Sterne in action is the incident with the "*fair fille de chambre*" from the chapter entitled "The Temptation. Paris" in *Sentimental Journey*. It includes the stylistic features and the narrative shape

of a scene of comic sexual intimacy which resonates with that in Joyce and ends with a dash marking an ellipsis when, attempting to help buckle her shoe, Yorick “unavoidably threw the fair *fille de chambre* off her centre – and then –” (Sterne 2005: 88-90).

The genetically inclined reader can trace the microhistory of where Joyce’s ellipsis enters the composition, back through the proof and typescript stages of the episode (where it is marked by three and eight dots respectively) first to the draft manuscript where it appears as a dash “the first is a bath –” (*JJA* 14 VI.A 17 -13), and then to the earlier draft where the sentence is composed in jigsaw fragments and it is already spelled out much as it appears in the final text referring to the “deux choses for which nudity is the first and indeed the only garment, a bath and the second – But at this point a bell in the hall” (*JJA* 14 IV.A 12-25). There is meanwhile something paradoxically appropriate to my present arguments about the discoverability or undiscoverability of points of ultimate origin in what seems to be the case here if we carry on the search. For the first source of this textual gap is itself a gap in the record in the sense that it is apparently missing at the “Oxen” notesheet stage which might exclusively link it to a moment of Joyce’s reading and notetaking. So the dash might originate from this or of the many other such comically suggestive aposioposes in Sterne or even elsewhere.

Birth as a metaphor for the origins of discourse

This discovery of a thing that is (in a sense) not there, helps introduce my second example pointing to another way of approaching intertextual-genetical relations which is familiar enough in the discussion of the relationship between Joyce and Sterne whether in “Oxen” or elsewhere, and whether or not supported by the archival or genetic record at this level of the specific detail. Fortuitously prominent among the fascinations which link the two authors is a fascination to the point of obsession with birth and the origins both of babies and of literary discourse. In both authors these reflect on each other in metaphorical ways and on metafictional levels, delighting the reader of *Tristram Shandy* (even more than *A Sentimental Journey*) and the reader of Joyce’s *A Portrait* as well as the “Ox-

en of the Sun” episode, establishing many other points of connection between the two authors throughout *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. Whilst as I have shown, we do (mostly) have the detailed intentional and genetic evidence for the use of *Sentimental Journey* for the parody passage in “Oxen”, we have nothing quite like that in the empirical sense to support these arguably much more important conceptual links between *Tristram Shandy* and *Ulysses*.

Tristram Shandy begins with and proceeds characteristically, to digress from, the autobiographical information with which Tristram as narrator wants to begin the story of his life: the facts of his conception and his birth. Since his own conception is inevitably unknowable from his personal experience, the distracted narrative proceeds through the other kinds of evidence that might be gathered to bear witness to the scene: the story of his father winding or forgetting to wind the clock, and the whole assemblage of abstruse legalistic knowledge and argument in which he is embroiled; his mother’s desire for a midwife to attend the birth, leading to the discussion of the midwife and of male and female midwifery as a whole; Susannah the chambermaid and the incident of the window sash; the Parson Yorick who may or may not be identified with the narrator of *Sentimental Journey* and/or Sterne himself; the curate who mishears the parents’ chosen name “Trismegistus”, causing the baby to be misnamed Tristram; and thence to Tristram’s Uncle Toby, the wound he has received at the Seige of Namur and his carnivalesque relationship with the Widow Wadman which takes over the narrative for the later sections of the book.

“I wish either my father or my mother [...] had minded what they were about when they begot me” declares Tristram at the start of his narrative, contrasting the “consideration” that might have produced him as a “rational being” with the “animal spirits” that “once set a-going”, “go clattering like hey-go-mad” and have, he supposes, created the being “in which the reader is likely to see me”, linking the comic all-too-human being of the character and the digressive textual being of the novel in a stroke of metafictional genius.

In addition to this metafictional brilliance *Tristram Shandy*, like *Ulysses*, is a narrative which proceeds by frequent interruptions to the narrative of non-narrative discourse. It is, from the title on, a book of the

life and opinions of the titular hero. Those “opinions”, if we understand them to refer to all the distracting digressive material that might be said to populate Sterne’s novel beyond sequential narrative action in the progressive, retrogressive or even digressive sense, are not just those of Tristram himself but digress in detail into the opinions, interests and “hobby horses” of the other major characters as well. Genetics in the biological sense, or to give it its proper medical title obstetrics and gynaecology, is highly prominent among those non-fictional discourses which Sterne, like Joyce, reflects and includes in its own discursive right. The books share a reference to that extraordinary work of popular obstetrics that circulated widely in England from the later seventeen to the early twentieth century, *Aristotle’s Masterpiece*. Sterne’s reference to it in Volume II Chapter IV cites the book’s curious interest in relation between the thoughts and their material manifestations in the flesh – a key topic from that opening page and its account of the material influence of the “animal spirits” or “homunculus” at the time of conception on the subsequent character of the infant conceived. For the *Masterpiece* (as for Sterne’s narrative), a key concern is with healthy or well-formed as opposed to monstrous birthing and some editions of the book include illustrations of a range of monstrous births. The book is discussed in “Oxen” and in the “Penelope” episode of *Ulysses* it is precisely those illustrations from the book that Molly recalls in the final episode (*U* 18.1240-1). For readers of both Joyce and Sterne (and their interconnections and similarities as strange, formally experimental fictions which deliberately deform the expectations and conventions of narrative discourse for comic, satiric or avant-garde effect) the supposedly “monstrous” in the formal sense is the metafictional point here. The teratology of the Homeric mythic and fantastic monsters who populate *The Odyssey* is transformed through Sternean narrative trickery into Joyce’s “*Homerische ungeheuer*” (Homeric monster novel), as he once called it, which proceeds by successive monstrosities of style through the 18 episodes of which the “Oxen of the Sun” becomes in this sense another microcosm or paradigm.

Joyce’s analogy between obstetrics and fiction is not spelled out in exactly the same way as Sterne’s but it is clearly present in the development of the English language and of English prose style from the Romans in Britain to the present day in “Oxen” and in the juxtaposition of that

with the development of Stephen Dedalus as a would-be writer character. It is there too on the metafictional level with James Joyce as the author of *Ulysses*, absorbing, digesting, rejecting or overcoming with comic absurdity a host of influences which are the currency of the English language literary medium and the historical determinants of its discursive forms. “[T]he elements are exactly what every novelist might use: man and woman, birth, childhood [...]” as Joyce is reported to have said to Eugene Jolas, “Did you ever read Laurence Sterne?” (Jolas 1948: 11-12).

Joyce’s rhetorical question to Jolas might have been asked in relation to “Oxen of the Sun” but it was here a pointer to *Finnegans Wake*. This leads us on to the increasing relevance of this aspect of the Sternean for that book whilst revealing a further dimension of the ways in which the details of evidence might relate to truth in this kind of intertextual argument in relation to that book. In the first (complete) sentence of *Finnegans Wake* another significant and well-known aspect of Joyce’s intertextual-genetic relation to Sterne can be found. When they begin to decipher “Sir Tristram violer d’amores, had passencore rearrived from this side the scraggy isthmus of North Armorica” (*FW* 003.4-5), many new readers of the book, whether or not aware of Joyce’s pointer to Jolas, will see a reference to *Tristram Shandy*. However, the more experienced reader of the *Wake* will know that this is somewhat misleading, since the primary reference here (and certainly the one for which we have authorial evidence) is to “Sir Amory Tristram 1st earl of Howth” who “changed his name to St Lawrence, b[orn] in Brittany (North Armorica)”. Joyce clearly indicated this to Harriet Shaw Weaver in his letter from Paris of 15 November 1926, adding, interestingly a sketch map to Dublin Bay and the location of Howth which he then glossed as “an island for old geographers” (*SL* 316-7).

Joyce needed to establish a location for the book at the start that links its diachronic account of the locality of Dublin with a synchronic extrapolation of global analogies that (when added to their own diachronic dimensions) take the reader by chains of association to every “hill” and “rill” all over the world, to both ends of the rainbow and beyond. Whilst it would probably be a mistake of emphasis to point to Sterne at this place in the text, it is much less easy to prove that the general pointer to Sterne made to Jolas isn’t relevant at all here or that we don’t see here an-

nounced for the first time in the text the broader literary connection between the two writers that constitutes the kind of generic as much as genetic affiliation between them that the critic Douglas Jefferson long ago defined as the “Tradition of Learned Wit” (Hawley 2009: 28). The intertextual critic needs to establish some or other textual location for the Joyce-Sterne connection and it is probably only in the case of a text like *Finnegans Wake* that we could claim that one such location might be here, in a place where the point of the connection, it could reasonably be argued, is not actually there at all.

The critic looking to explore different connections and different kinds of connection between Joyce and Sterne then has a wealth of evidence but also of different kinds of evidence and different kinds of critical obligation to navigate and may typically emerge with a range of textual and metatextual connections drawing on things as diverse as the comic tendency of Joyce’s Dublin “gallants” to couch their amorous adventures in a style that is a parody of the sentimental travelogue of the late Eighteenth-Century, on the one hand, to, on the other hand, the play with the material substance of the printed book which connects Sterne’s blank, marbled or inked-out pages and diagrammatic representations of his distracted and digressive narrative sequence in *Tristram Shandy* to Joyce’s capitalised headlines in “Aeolus”, the theatrical dialogue of “Circe”, the question and answer layout of text in “Ithaca” or the (near) complete removal of punctuation marks in “Penelope”.

“Whereabouts”

There may be no single location, no “whereabouts” which can exclusively encapsulate all the connections between Sterne and Joyce, and the above examples may make us as alert to the significance of what is not there as to what is. For my third and final example, however, I have selected a plot connection between two of the best known incidents in the two respective texts, which is indeed embodied in a verbal connection (though not one in a notebook entry) occurring in the very word “whereabouts”.

Readers of *Tristram Shandy*, well before the end of Book One, have become distracted from the story of Tristram's conception and birth and he himself somewhat exasperated with the "machinery" of its "digressive" and "progressive" "contrary movements", despite claiming that such "[d]igressions, incontestably, are the sunshine; they are the life, the soul of reading". This is to use the language of Volume I Chapter XXII of *Tristram Shandy* which Joyce apparently parodies in the postcard he wrote to Shaw Weaver on 16 April 1927 describing himself as "one of the greatest engineers" who is "making an engine with only one wheel" that is "a wheel, I tell the world. *And* it's all square" (SL 321). At the close of Book One we are told that Uncle Toby has a hobby horse which concerns the wound he has received at the siege of Namur (making him another Odysseus returning from the wars, as unlikely an Odysseus as Bloom if not more so). From that point on Uncle Toby is as central a focus of the narrative as Tristram himself, obsessing over the battlefield history of the Siege of Namur and developing his farcical relationship with the Widow Wadman. "I have begun a new book," Tristram begins Book Two,

on purpose that I might have room enough to explain the nature of the perplexities in which my uncle Toby was involved, from the many discourses and interrogations about the siege of Namur, where he received his wound. (Sterne 2009: 67)

Uncle Toby puzzles over the precise strategic mapping of the Namur siege battlefield, the St Nicholas Gate, confluence of the rivers, trenches and bastion being particular features of the scene, reconstructing where it might have been that he received his wound. By Volume VIII and IX of the novel, however, it is no longer the geography of Uncle's Toby's Siege of Namur that is the driving "animal spirit" of the narrative but rather the siege of Uncle Toby himself by the Widow Wadman who (as we have seen already in the mote in the eye incident) is keen to see him as a possible husband and therefore especially concerned to know more about his wound. Her focus is not so much on "whereabouts" on the battlefield he sustained his wound as "whereabouts" in the groin area of his person he sustained it with the obvious implications which this might have for her potential future marital happiness. In Volume IX Chapter XXIV, unable

to extract the required information from Dr Slop, she asks: “Was it without remission?”; “Was it more tolerable in bed?”; “Could he lie on both sides alike with it?”; “Was he able to mount a horse?”; “Was motion bad for it?” until eventually she comes out with the key question:

– And whereabouts, dear sir, quoth Mrs Wadman, a little categorically, did you receive this sad blow?

The narrative continues with mock gravity:

– In asking this question, Mrs Wadman gave a slight glance towards the waistband of my Uncle Toby’s red plush breeches, expecting naturally as the shortest reply to it that my Uncle Toby would lay his fore-finger upon the place – It fell out otherwise – for my Uncle Toby having got his wound before the gate of St Nicholas, in one of the traverses of the trench, opposite to the salient angle of the demi-bastion of St. Roch; he could at any time stick a pin upon the identical spot of ground where he was standing when the stone struck him [...]

My Uncle Toby measured off thirty toises, with Mrs Wadman’s scissors, from the returning angle before the gate of St. Nicholas; and with such virgin modesty laid her finger upon the place, that the goddess of Decency, if then in being – if not, ‘twas her shade – shook her head, and with a finger wavering across her eyes-forbid her to explain the mistake. (Sterne 2009: 529)

Even as abbreviated here this may be one of the longest joke punchlines in the history of jokes and unique to Sterne but, the Joycean reader may ask, “whereabouts” have we heard it before? The answer, of course, is in “Penelope” where we have this displaced but instantly recognisable version of the comic misunderstanding when Molly recalls her dislike of the confessional:

when I used to go to Father Corrigan he touched me father and what harm if he did where and I said on the canal bank like a fool but whereabouts on your person my child on the leg behind high up was it yes rather high up was it where you sit down yes O Lord couldnt he say bottom right out and have done with it (*U* 18.109)

We may not know whether Stephen or Bloom are supposed to have read *Tristram Shandy* or even when exactly Joyce himself first read it, but we may well surmise on the strength of this passage that Joyce intended Molly to have done, perhaps put in the way of it by Hester Stanhope with the clutch of Victorian sensation novels she lists later in the episode that make up further detailed evidence of her as a reader of prose fiction (*U* 18.650-9) and certainly quite appropriately for her characterisation recalling a scene associated with the Widow Wadman, even if she takes the modest Uncle Toby part in the scene. For all the differences of context and significance between the two characters and scenes the evidence is there in the identical play on the ambiguity of words describing locations whether in geography or upon the body and the ways in which that ambiguity reveals what a Freudian analysis might call repressed unconscious material emerging from the libido. The precise “whereabouts” of the connection seems further clinched by the presence in both of the word “whereabouts” itself forming an immaculate conception link between the two passages.

What is, then, at stake in this account of the variety of intertextual-genetical relations we can find operating between Joyce and Sterne and in this intriguing final example which seems so convincing in its connection? No experienced reader of Joyce would be foolish enough to claim that, among all the intertextual connections and kinds of connection that the texts throw up, any one connection somehow explains or trumps all the others. Most would agree though that these examples go some way towards revealing the variety of ways in which the Joycean allusion might operate, drawing upon the worlds of genetic scholarship and of cultural theory alike though not fully bound by the prescriptions of either. In Joyce we have examples of connections provable by meticulous textual scholarship but also ones that exist in apparent contradiction to the surface evidence. In this shared moment between “Penelope” and *Tristram Shandy* linking the Widow Wadman (or even Uncle Toby) and Molly Bloom we have a fortuitous final example which highlights many of the methodological problems of precisely locating the crux of the genetic and the intertextual relationship – its “whereabouts” – whilst highlighting the comic subtexts of genesis in several of its senses at once.

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